



JOHN JACOB ASTOR

**John Jacob Astor – Business Master**

**This is a biographical work**

Based on the public domain book

**“LITTLE JOURNEYS TO THE HOMES OF GREAT BUSINESS MEN”**

by ELBERT HUBBARD

with edits, images, arrangement

by Larry W Jones

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## INTRODUCTION

The man who makes it the habit of his life to go to bed at nine o'clock, usually gets rich and is always reliable. Of course, going to bed does not make him rich—I merely mean that such a man will in all probability be up early in the morning and do a big day's work, so his weary bones put him to bed early. Rogues do their work at night. Honest men work by day. It's all a matter of habit, and good habits in America make any man rich. Wealth is a result of habit. — JOHN JACOB ASTOR

## LITTLE JOURNEYS

Victor Hugo says, "When you open a school, you close a prison." This seems to require a little explanation. Victor Hugo did not have in mind a theological school, nor yet a young ladies' seminary, nor an English boarding-school, nor a military academy, and least of all a parochial institute. What Victor was thinking of was a school where people, young and old, were all taught to be self-respecting, self-reliant and efficient, to care for themselves, to help bear the world's burdens and help others by adding to their happiness.

John Jacob Astor was born into a Dutch family that had migrated down to Heidelberg from Antwerp. Through some strange freak of reversion the father of the boy bred back, and was more or less of a stone-age cave-dweller. He was a butcher by trade, in the little town of Waldorf, a few kilometers from Heidelberg. A butcher's business then was to travel around and kill the pet pig, or sheep, or cow that the tender-hearted owners dare not harm. The butcher was an outcast, a sort of unofficial, industrial hangman.

At the same time he was more or less of a genius, for he climbed steeples, dug wells, and did all kinds of disagreeable jobs that needed to be done, and from which sober and cautious men shrank like unwashed wool. One such man—a German, too—lives in East Aurora. I joined him, accidentally, in walking along a country road the other day. He carried a big basket on his arm, and was peacefully smoking a big Dutch pipe. We talked about music and he was regretting the decline of a taste for Bach, when he shifted the basket to the other arm.

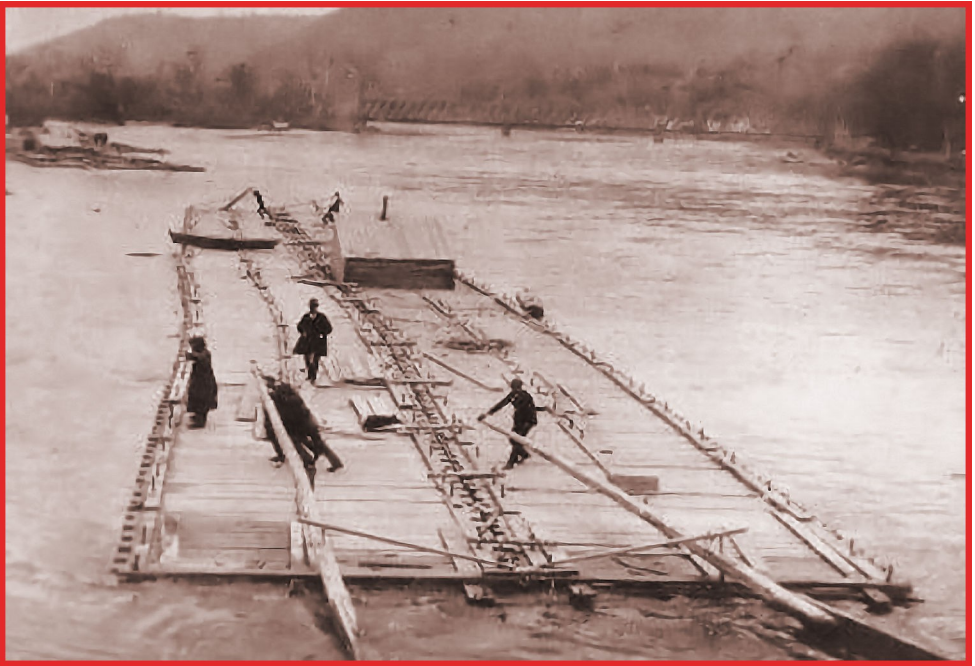


"What have you in the basket?" I asked. And here is the answer, "Noddings—but dynamite. I was going up on der hill, already, to blow me oud some stumps oud." And I then suddenly bethought me of an engagement I had at the village.

John Jacob Astor was the youngest of four sons, and as many daughters. The brothers ran away early in life, and went to sea or joined the army. One of these boys came to America, and followed his father's trade of butcher. Jacob Astor, the happy father of John Jacob, used to take the boy with him on his pig-killing expeditions. This for two reasons—one, so the lad would learn a trade, and the other to make sure that the boy did not run away.

Parents who hold their children by force have a very slender claim upon them. The pastor of the local Lutheran Church took pity on this boy, who had such disgust for his father's trade and hired him to work in his garden and run errands. The intelligence and alertness of the lad made him look like good timber for a minister. He learned to read and write and was duly confirmed as a member of the church. Under the kindly care of the old village parson John Jacob grew in mind and body—his estate was to come later. When John was seventeen, his father came and made a formal demand for his services. The young man must take up his father's work of butchering.

That night John Jacob walked out of Waldorf by the waning light of the moon and headed for Antwerp. He carried a big red handkerchief in which his worldly goods were knotted, and in his heart he had the blessings of the Lutheran clergyman, who walked with him for half a mile, and said a prayer at parting. To have youth, high hope, right intent, health and a big red handkerchief is to be greatly blessed.



John Jacob got a job next day as oarsman on a lumber raft. He reached Antwerp in a week. There he got a job on the docks as a laborer. The next day he was promoted to checker-off. The captain of a trading ship asked him to go to London and figure up the manifests on the way. He went. The captain of the ship recommended him to the company in London, and the boy was soon piling up wealth at the rate of a guinea a month.

In September, 1783, came the news to London that George Washington had surrendered. In any event, peace had been declared—Cornwallis had forced the issue, so the Americans had stopped fighting. A little later it was given out that England had given up her American Colonies, and they were free. Intuitively John Jacob Astor felt that the "New World" was the place for him. He bought passage on the ship "North Carolina" bound for Baltimore, at a cost of five pounds, arriving in March 1784.

He then fastened five pounds in a belt around his waist, and with the rest of his money—after sending two pounds home to his father, with a letter of love—bought a dozen German flutes. He had learned to play on this instrument with proficiency, and in America he thought there would be an opening for musicians and musical instruments. John Jacob was then nearly twenty years of age.

The ship spread her sails in November 1783, but did not reach Baltimore until the middle of March, having to put back to sea on account of storms when within sight of the Chesapeake. Then a month was spent later hunting for the Chesapeake. There was plenty of time for flute-playing and making of plans. On board ship he met a German, twenty years older than himself, who was a fur trader and had been home on a visit. John Jacob played the flute and the German friend told stories of fur trading among the Indians.

Young Astor's curiosity was excited. The Waldorf-Astoria plan of flute-playing was forgotten. He fed on fur trading. The habits of the animals, the value of their pelts, the curing of the furs, their final market, was all gone over again and again. The two extra months at sea gave him an insight into a great new business and he had the time to think about his ideas. He thought about it—wrote about it in his diary, for he was at the journal-age. Wild wolves, bears, badgers, minks, and muskrats, filled his dreams.

After three weeks in Baltimore he was disappointed to learn that there were no fur traders there. He started for New York. Here he found work with a certain Robert Bowne, a Quaker, who bought and sold furs. Young Astor set himself to learn the business—every part of it. He was always sitting on the curb at the door before the owner got around in the morning, carrying a big key to open the warehouse. He was the last to leave at night. He pounded furs with a stick, salted them, sorted them, took them to the tanners, brought them home. Contacts included William Backhouse, a settled merchant in NYC.

He worked, and as he worked, learned. To secure the absolute confidence of a man, obey him. Only thus do you get him to lay aside his weapons, be he friend or enemy. Any dullard can be waited on and served, but to serve well requires judgment, skill, tact, patience and industry. The qualities that make a youth a good servant are the basic ones for mastership. Astor's alertness, willingness, loyalty, and ability to obey, delivered his employer over into his hands.





Robert Bowne, the good old Quaker, insisted that Jacob should call him Robert; and from boarding the young man with a near-by war widow who took cheap boarders, Bowne took young Astor to his own house, and raised his pay from two dollars a week to six. Bowne had made an annual trip to Montreal for many years. Montreal was the metropolis for furs.

Bowne went to Montreal himself because he did not know of any one he could trust to carry his messagees. Those who knew furs and had judgment were not honest, and those who were honest did not know furs. Honest fools are really no better than rogues, as far as practical purposes are concerned. Bowne once found a man who was honest and also knew furs, but alas! he had a passion for drink, and no prophet could foretell his "periodic," until after it occurred.

Young Astor had been with Bowne only a year. He spoke imperfect English, but he did not drink nor gamble, and he knew furs and was honest. Bowne started him off for Canada with a belt full of gold and his only weapon was a German flute that he carried in his hand. Mr. Bowne being a Quaker did not believe in guns. Flutes were a little out of his line, too, but he preferred them to flintlocks. John Jacob Astor ascended the Hudson River to Albany, and then with pack on his back, struck north, alone, through the forest for Lake Champlain. As he approached an Indian settlement he played his flute. The Indians showed no disposition to give him the hook. He hired Indians to paddle him up to the Canadian border. He reached Montreal. The fur traders there knew Bowne as a very sharp buyer, and so had their quills out on his approach. But young Astor was seemingly indifferent. His manner was courteous and easy. He got close to his man, and took his pick of the pelts at fair prices. He then expended all of his money, and even bought on credit, for there are men who always have credit.

Young Astor found Indian nature to be simply human nature. The savage was a man, and courtesy, gentleness and fairly good flute-playing was soothing to his savage breast. Astor had beads and blankets, a flute and a smile. The Indians carried his goods by relays and then passed him on with guttural certificates as to character, to other red men, and at last he reached New York without the loss of a pelt or the dampening of his ardor. Bowne was delighted. To young Astor it was nothing. He had in his blood the success corpuscle. He might have remained with Bowne and become a partner in the business, but Bowne had business limitations and Astor hadn't. So after a three years' apprenticeship, Astor knew all that Bowne did and all he himself could imagine besides. So he resigned. In 1786 John Jacob Astor began business on his own account in a little store on Water Street, New York. There was one room and a basement. He had saved a few hundred dollars; his brother, the butcher, had loaned him a few hundred more, and Robert Bowne had contributed a bale of skins to be paid for "at thy own price and thy own convenience."





Astor had made friends with the Indians up the Hudson clear to Albany, and they were acting as recruiting agents for him. He was a bit boastful of the fact that he had taught an Indian to play the flute, and anyway he had sold the Indian the instrument for a bale of beaver pelts, with a bearskin thrown in for good measure. It was a musical achievement as well as a commercial one.

Having collected several thousand dollars' worth of furs he shipped them to London and embarked as a passenger in the steerage. The trip showed him that ability to sell was quite as necessary as the ability to buy—a point which with all of his shrewdness Bowne had never guessed. In London furs were becoming a fad. Astor sorted and sifted his buyers, as he had his skins. He himself dressed in a suit of fur and thus proved his ability as an advertiser. He picked his men and charged all the traffic would bear.

He took orders, on sample, from the nobility and sundry of the gentry, and thereby cut the middleman. All of the money he received for his skins, Astor invested in "Indian Goods"—colored cloth, beads, blankets, knives, axes, and musical instruments. His was the first store in New York that carried a stock of musical instruments. These he sold to Indians, and also he supplied the stolid Dutch the best of everything in this particular line from a bazoo to a Stradivarius violin.

When he got back to New York, he at once struck out through the wilderness to buy furs of the Indians, or better still, to interest them in bringing furs to him. He knew the value of friendship in trade as no man of the time did. He went clear through to Lake Erie, down to Niagara Falls, along Lake Ontario, across to Lake Champlain and then down the Hudson. He foresaw the great city of Buffalo, and Rochester as well, only he said that Rochester would probably be situated directly on the Lake. But the water-power of the Genesee Falls proved a stronger drawing power than the Lake Front. He prophesied that along the banks of the Niagara Falls would be built the greatest manufacturing city in the world. There were flour-mills and sawmills there then. The lumber first used in building the city of Buffalo was brought from the sawmills at "The Falls."



Electric power, of course, was then a thing unguessed, but Astor prophesied the Erie Canal, and made good guesses as to where prosperous cities would appear along its line.

In 1785 John Jacob Astor married Sarah Todd. Her mother was a Brevoort, and it was brought about by her coming to Astor to buy furs with which to make herself a coat. Her ability to judge furs and make them up won the heart of the dealer. The marriage brought young Astor

into "the best Dutch New York society," a combination that was quite as exclusive then as now.



This marriage was a business partnership as well as marital and proved a success in every way. Sarah was a worker, with all the good old Dutch qualities of patience, persistence, industry and economy. When her husband went on trips she kept store. She was the only partner in which he ever had implicit faith. And faith is the first requisite in success.



Captain Cook had skirted the Pacific Coast from Cape Horn to Alaska, and had brought to the attention of the fur-dealing and fur-wearing world the sea-otter of the Northern Pacific. He also gave a psychological prophetic glimpse of the insidious sealskin sack. In Seventeen Hundred and Ninety, a ship from the Pacific brought a hundred otterskins to New York. The skins were quickly sold to London buyers at exorbitant prices. The nobility wanted sea-otter, or "Royal American Ermine," as they called it. The scarcity boomed the price.

## Gazette Of the United States, New York, Aug 11, 1790

[—556—]

To the PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES.  
The ADDRESS of the Convention of the UNIVERSAL  
SAL CHURCH, assembled in Philadelphia, 1790.

SIR,  
PERMIT us in the name of the Society whom we represent, to concur in the numerous congratulations which have been offered to you since your accession to the government of the United States.

For an account of our principles we beg leave to refer you to the pamphlet, which we have now the honor to put into your hands. In this publication it will appear, that the peculiar doctrine which we hold, is not less friendly to the order and happiness of society, than it is essential to the perfections of the Deity.

It is a singular circumstance in the history of this doctrine, that it has been preached and defended in every age, since the first promulgation of the gospel, but we represent the first society professing this doctrine, that have formed themselves into an independent church. Posterity will hardly fail of connecting this memorable event, with the auspicious years of peace, liberty and free inquiry in the United States, which distinguished the administration of General Washington.

We join this publicly with our affectionate fellow-citizens in thanks to Almighty God for the gift of his numerous signal acts of goodness to our country in preserving your valuable life in a late dangerous indisposition, and we assure you Sir, that duty will not prompt us more than affection to pray, that you may long continue the support and ornament of our country, and that you may hereafter fill a higher station, and enjoy the greater reward of being a King and Priest to our God.

Signed in behalf and by order of the Convention,  
JOHN MURRAY,  
W. EUGENE LMLAY.

To the CONVENTION of the UNIVERSAL  
CHURCH, lately assembled at Philadelphia.

GENTLEMEN,  
I THANK you cordially for the congratulations which you offer on my appointment to the office I have the honor to hold in the government of the United States.

It gives me the most sensible pleasure to find, that, in our nation, however different are the sentiments of the citizens on religious doctrines, they generally concur in one thing: For their political professions and practices are almost universal.

In the beginning of 1786, the snow Captain Cook, of 300 tons, Captain Lorie, and the experiment, Captain Guile, of 100 tons, were fitted out from Bombay. They arrived at Nootka in June, and left that place sometime before August, with 600 skins. They traced the coast up to Prince William's sound, without adding much to their trade; and arrived at Canton on the 4th of April following. This cargo was sold altogether at 40 dollars per skin, which amounts to 24,000 dol.

The Nootka, Capt. Mears, of 200 tons, failed from Bengal, separately, and the sale of his cargo at Canton, was as follows:

50 prime sea-otter-skins at 97 dol. each,	4,950 dol.
50 do. - - - - -	70 - - - 3,500
52 do. - - - - -	50 - - - 2,600
58 do. - - - - -	35 - - - 2,050
21 half worn, - - -	20 - - - 620
50 do. - - - - -	15 - - - 750
26 old and bad, - -	5 - - - 130
12 large pieces, - -	10 - - - 120
17 smaller, - - - -	5 - - - 85
37 sea-otter tails, - -	2 - - - 74
31 inferior, - - - -	- - - 50
48 land otter-skins - -	6 - - - 288
14 very bad beaver -	3 - - - 42
27 martin skins, - -	- - - 14

Total 14,842 dol.

The Imperial Eagle, Capt. Berkley, left Of tend the 23d of November, 1786; arrived at Nootka in the beginning of June, 1787, and left it with a cargo of near 700 prime sea-otter skins, and above 100 of an inferior quality: They were not sold when the Queen Charlotte left China, but the price put on them was 30,000 dollars.

The cargoes of the King George and Queen Charlotte consisted of 2522 sea-otter skins, 434 cub, and 44 foxskins, which were disposed of by the East India Company's supercargoes. The rest, which consisted of 1080 beaver tails, sundry pieces of beaver skins and cloaks, 110 fur seal skins, about 150 land beaver, 60 fine cloaks, of the earless marmot, together with a few racoon, fox, lynx, and other skins, were left with the Captains to be sold in the best manner which they were able.

The part put into the hands of the supercargoes was sold for	50,000
The 1080 beaver tails sold for 2 dollars each, or	2,160
The 120 seal skins for 5 ditto	555
A small parcel of rubbish	50
The cloaks, and other furs, &c.	1000

## FOR SALE The IRON

BELONGING to the Estate of J. J. pleasantly situated on the falls of the river, two miles of the town of Frederic and Tide-Water—building of 24 fires, and four hammers—A Coal Ho and Rolling Mill, 68 feet by 30, for A Merchant Mill, 50 feet by 36, with wherrel French Mill, and a mill for manufacturing Flour in the belt with the same, 60 feet by 10. The walls stone, extremely strong and neat, all running gears, machinery and tools, and judiciously contrived, and per and advantageous manner, on large different departments are convenient proper distances, on a deep and supply more large and extensive work cautiously secured and guarded against high floods; has its source in the main proportion whereof, to any res is at pleasure collected and turned into contrived strong dams, which have since their formation, near nineteen fall of the water operating on the, the greatest part of the works are in g may be rendered to at a small expen to, are a convenient Tanyard, variety mechanical business of different kind Workmen, &c.—And about 4 to 800 mostly wooded, including some Farm will be offered for sale, a number of smelters, Refiners, Colliers, Forge Smiths, Millers, Waggoners, &c. T over any in America, particularly in produce, as there is none of the kind to, of which extensive, rich and fe conveyance by water, nor is there as for a Slicing mill at all in this State, ton, or vie with its manufactory—fo ce that can well be pointed out on the tion will be shown, and the terms of sale for the purchaser, by

ADAM H. ABNER  
Virginia, May 28, 1790.

## TREASURY DEP.

NOTICE is hereby given, that Prope of the Secretary of the Treasury, is, clause, for the supply of all nations, to the United States, from the first day of December 1791, both days inclusive, at the herein after mentioned, viz.  
At any place or places, betwixt Yorkton and Fort Pitt and at Fort Pitt,  
At any place or places, betwixt Fort River Ohio, and at Fort Ohio,  
At any place or places, betwixt Fort Mter Muskingum, and at the mouth of the  
At any place or places, betwixt the mouth of the said River in the Territory, and over to the Cayuga River, and down the  
At any place or places, betwixt the mouth of the Scioto River, and at the

Ships were quickly fitted out and dispatched. Boats bound for the whale fisheries were diverted, and New Bedford had a spasm of jealousy. Astor encouraged these expeditions, but at first invested no money in them, as he considered them "extra hazardous." He was not a speculator. Until the year Eighteen Hundred, Astor lived over his store in Water Street, but he then moved

to the plain and modest house at Two Hundred and Twenty-three Broadway, on the site of the old Astor House. Here he lived for twenty-five years.

The fur business was simple and very profitable. Astor now was confining himself mostly to beaver-skins. He fixed the price at one dollar, to be paid to the Indians or trappers. It cost fifty cents to prepare and transport the skin to London. There it was sold at from five to ten dollars. All of the money paid for skins was then invested in English merchandise, which was sold in New York at a profit. In Eighteen Hundred, Astor owned three ships which he had bought so as to absolutely control his trade. Ascertaining that London dealers were reshipping furs to China, early in the century he dispatched one of his ships (the Beaver) directly to the Orient, loaded with furs, with explicit written instructions to the captain (Isaac Chauncey) as to what the cargo should be sold for. The money was to be invested in teas and silks.

**(Note)** Beaver was a 427-ton merchant ship owned by John Jacob Astor that was in service from 1806 to the middle of the century. Beaver was designed for John Jacob Astor by Eckford & Beebe, with working being completed in 1805.

The ship sailed to the Qing Empire in 1806 and was captained by Isaac Chauncey. (Promoted to the rank of Captain in 1806, he was furloughed to take command of the merchant ship Beaver on a voyage to China for John Jacob Astor.)



The Beaver entered the port of Guangzhou and "a full load of Teas, Nankeens & China" was purchased. The Beaver departed back to New York City. The voyage was a success and brought Astor a sizable profit.

The ship sailed away, and had been gone a year. No tidings had come from her. Suddenly a messenger came with news that the ship was in the bay. We can imagine the interest of Mr. and Mrs. Astor as they locked their store and ran to the Battery. Sure enough, it was their ship, riding gently on the tide, snug, strong and safe as when she had left.

The profit on this one voyage was seventy thousand dollars. By Eighteen Hundred and Ten, John Jacob Astor was worth two million dollars. He began to invest all his surplus money in New York real estate. He bought acreage property in the vicinity of Canal Street. Next he bought Richmond Hill, the estate of Aaron Burr. It consisted of one hundred and sixty acres just above Twenty-third Street. He paid for the land a thousand dollars an acre.



People said Astor was crazy. In ten years he began to sell lots from the Richmond Hill property at the rate of five thousand dollars an acre. Fortunately for his estate he did not sell much of the land at this price, for it is this particular dirt that makes up that vast property known as "The Astor Estate."

Roger Morris is known in history as the man who married Mary Philipse. And this lady lives in history because she had the felicity of having been proposed to by 25 year-old George Washington. When Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, he occupied the Roger Morris Mansion as headquarters.



The property was confiscated and turned over to the State of New York as contraband of war. The Morris estate of about fifty thousand acres was parceled out and sold by the State of New York to settlers. It seems, however, that Roger Morris had only a life interest in the estate and this was a legal point so fine that it was entirely overlooked in the joy of confiscation. John Jacob Astor accidentally ascertained the facts. He was convinced that the heirs could not be robbed of their rights through the acts of a leaseholder, which, legally was the status of Roger Morris. Astor was a good real estate lawyer himself, but he referred the point to the best counsel he could find. They agreed with him. He next hunted up the heirs and bought their quit-claims for one hundred thousand dollars. He then notified the parties who had purchased the land, and they in turn made claim upon the State for protection.

After much legal parleying the case was tried according to stipulation with the State of New York, directly, as defendant and Astor and the occupants as plaintiffs. Daniel Webster and Martin Van Buren appeared for the State, and an array of lesser legal lights for Astor. The case was narrowed down to the plain and simple point that Roger Morris was not the legal owner of the estate, and that the rightful heirs could not be made to suffer for the "treason, contumacy and contravention" of another. Astor won, and as a compromise the State issued him twenty-year bonds bearing six per cent interest, for the neat sum of five hundred thousand dollars—not that Astor needed the money but finance was to him a game, and he had won.

Astor took a deep interest in the Lewis and Clark expedition. He went to Washington to see Lewis, and questioned him at great length about the Northwest. Legend says that he gave the hardy discoverer a thousand dollars, which was a big amount for him to give away. "This country will see a chain of growing and prosperous cities straight from New York to Astoria, Oregon," said this man in reply to a doubting questioner. He laid his plans before Congress, urging a line of army posts, forty miles apart, from the western extremity of Lake Superior to the Pacific. "These forts or army posts will evolve into cities," said Astor, when he called on Thomas Jefferson, who was then President of the United States. Jefferson was interested, but non-committal. Astor exhibited maps of the Great Lakes, and the country beyond. He argued with a prescience then not possessed by any living man that at the western extremity of Lake Superior would grow up a great city. Yet in Eighteen Hundred and Seventy-six, Duluth was ridiculed by the caustic tongue of Proctor Knott,

who asked, "What will become of Duluth when the lumber crop is cut?" Astor proceeded to say that another great city would grow up at the southern extremity of Lake Michigan. General Dearborn, Secretary of War under Jefferson had just established Fort Dearborn on the present site of Chicago. Astor commended this, and said: "From a fort you get a trading post, and from a trading post you will get a city."

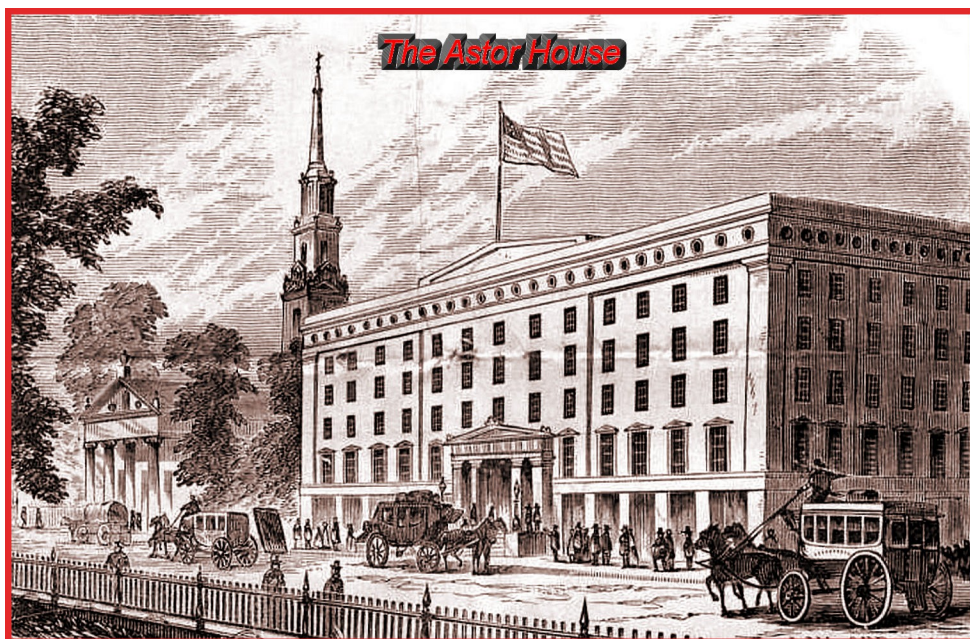
He pointed out to Jefferson the site, on his map, of the Falls of St. Anthony. "There you will have a fort some day, for wherever there is water-power, there will grow up mills for grinding grain and sawmills, as well. This place of power will have to be protected, and so you will have there a post which will eventually be replaced by a city." Yet Fort Snelling was nearly fifty years in the future and St. Paul and Minneapolis were dreams undreamed. Jefferson took time to think about it and then wrote Astor thus, "Your beginning of a city on the Western Coast is a great acquisition, and I look forward to a time when our population will spread itself up and down along the whole Pacific frontage, unconnected with us, excepting by ties of blood and common interest, and enjoying like us, the rights of self-government."

Great as was Jefferson, he regarded the achievement of Lewis and Clarke as a feat and not an example. He looked upon the Rocky Mountains as a natural separation of peoples "bound by ties of blood and mutual interest" but otherwise unconnected. To pierce these mighty mountains with tunnels, and whisper across them with the human voice, were miracles unguessed. But Astor closed his eyes and saw pack-trains, mules laden with skins, winding across these mountains, and down to tide-water at Astoria. There his ships would be lying at the docks, ready to sail for the Far East.

A company was formed, and two expeditions set out for the mouth of the Columbia River, one by land and the other by sea. The land expedition barely got through alive—it was a perilous undertaking, with accidents by flood and field and in the imminent deadly breach. But the route by the water was feasible. The town was founded and soon became a centre of commercial activity. Had Astor been on the ground to take personal charge, a city like Seattle would have bloomed and blossomed on the Pacific, fifty years ago. But power at Astoria was subdivided among several little men, who wore themselves out in a struggle for honors. There came a grand grab at Astoria and it was each for himself and the devil take the hindermost—it was a stampede.

John Jacob Astor lost a million dollars by the venture. He smiled calmly and said, "The plan was right, but my men were weak, that is all. The gateway to China will be from the northwest. My plans were correct. Time will vindicate my reasoning."

When the block on Broadway, bounded by Vesey and Barclay Streets, was cleared of its plain two story houses, preparatory to building the Astor House, wise men shook their heads and said, "It's too far uptown." But the free bus that met all boats solved the difficulty, and gave the cue to hotel men all over the world. The hotel that runs full is a gold mine. Hungry men feed, and the beautiful part about the hotel business is that the customers are hungry the next day—also thirsty. Astor was worth ten million, but he took a personal delight in sitting in the lobby of the Astor House and watching the dollars roll into this palace that his brain had planned. To have an idea—to watch it grow—to then work it out, and see it made manifest in concrete substance, this was his joy. The Astor House was a bigger hostelry in its day than the Waldorf-Astoria is now.



The famous old Astor House, Broadway and Vesey Street, opposite the entrance to the [City Hall] Park, as it appeared when first erected in 1842.

## THE FUR & OPIUM TRADE

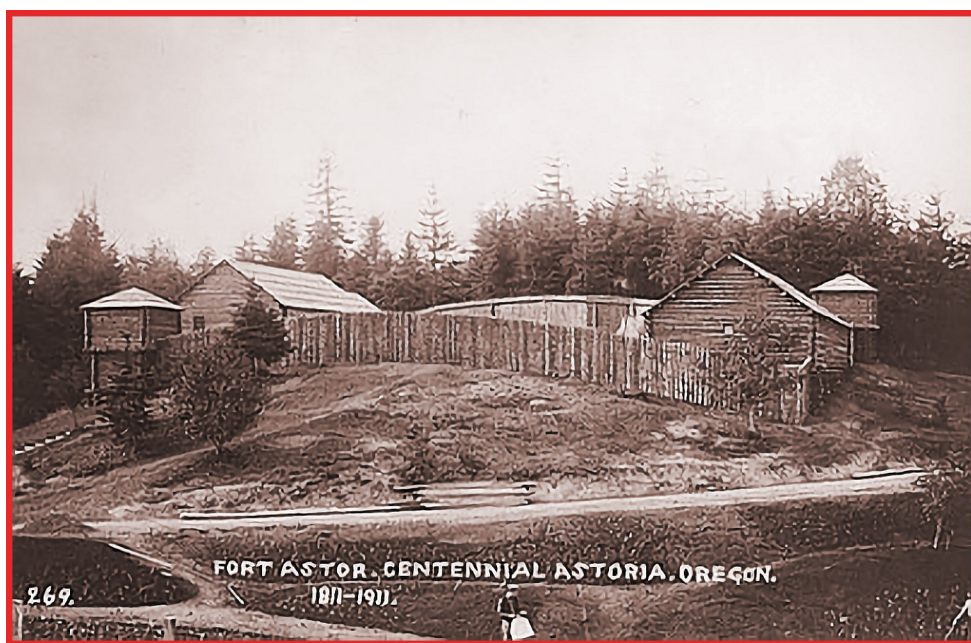
Astor took advantage of the 1794 "Jay Treaty" between Great Britain and the United States, which opened new markets in Canada and the Great Lakes region. In London, Astor at once made a contract with the North West Company, which from Montreal rivaled the trade interests of the Hudson's Bay Company, then based in London. Astor imported furs from Montreal to New York and shipped them to Europe. By 1800, he had amassed almost a quarter of a million dollars and had become one of the leading figures in the fur trade. His agents worked throughout the western areas and were ruthless in competition. In 1800, following the example of the Empress of China, the first American trading vessel to China, Astor traded furs, teas, and sandalwood with Canton in China, and greatly benefited from it.

*Empress Of China (center) at Wampoa China*

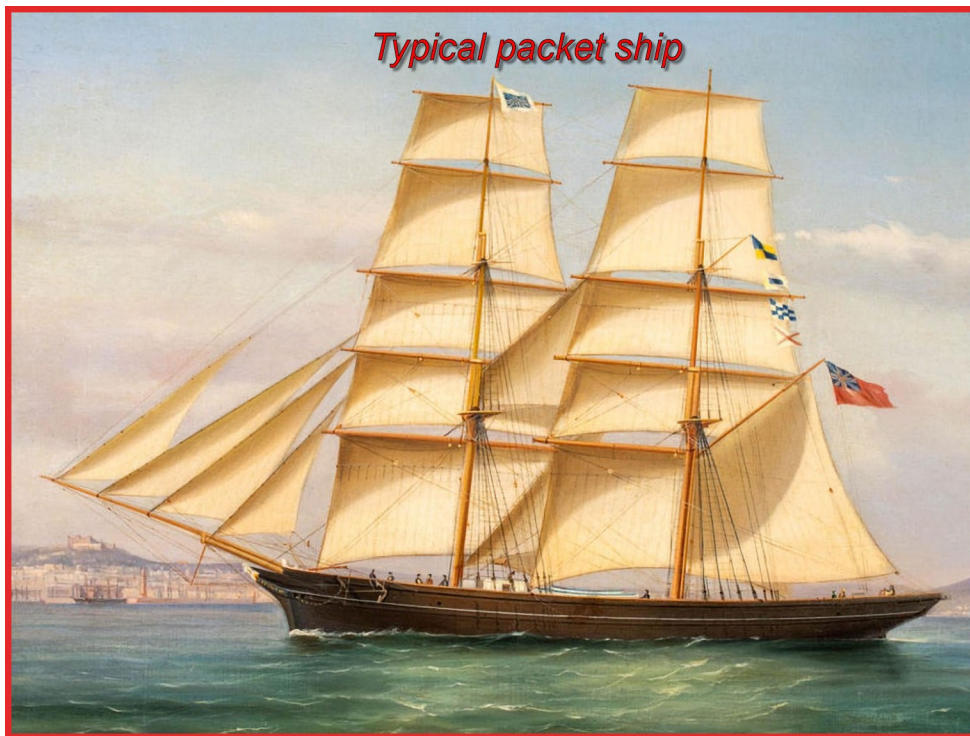




The U.S. Embargo Act in 1807, however, disrupted Astor's import/export business because it closed off trade with Canada. With the permission of President Thomas Jefferson, Astor established the American Fur Company on April 6, 1808. Later came the Pacific Fur Company, and the Southwest Fur Company, to control fur trading in the Great Lakes and Columbia River region. His 1811 Columbia River trading post was the first U.S. community on the Pacific coast. He financed the overland Astor Expedition in 1810–1812 to reach the outpost. Members of the expedition were to discover South Pass, through which hundreds of thousands of settlers on the Oregon, Mormon, and California Trails used to later pass through the Rocky Mountains.



Astor's fur trading ventures were disrupted during the War of 1812, when the British captured his trading posts. In 1816, he joined the opium smuggling trade. His American Fur Company purchased ten tons of Ottoman-produced opium, and shipped the contraband to Canton onboard the packet ship *Macedonian*. He purchased the brig *Macedonian* for \$27,000 and spent an additional \$15,000 outfitting it for sea. The cargo of furs and ginseng was small, valued at only \$30,000. The financier gambled, however, that if peace came, the return cargo of tea would be worth \$300,000. Despite the potential for windfall profits, Astor still tried to reduce his risks. The vessel itself was chosen because of its speed.



He also tried, unsuccessfully, to sell a one-quarter interest to a Baltimore merchant. Finally, as with so many of his other voyages, Astor somehow managed to secure government assistance. When the *Macedonian* put to sea in January 1815, it was accompanied by several U.S. naval vessels, including the *President*, commanded by Stephen Decatur, bound for the Pacific Ocean. American naval vessels encountered the blockading British fleet. Even though the *President* was captured, the *Macedonian* managed to escape the combat and pursuing British ships. It arrived safely in Canton in July 1815. Astor later left the Chinese opium trade and sold opium solely in Britain.

The opium trade presented special problems in the Canton market. The British first imported opium from India; and since the mid-eighteenth century with the introduction of smoking, the Chinese government, conscious of its social consequences, had tried unsuccessfully, to stop its importation. Consequently, the opium trade was illegal in China, although nearly all the China traders smuggled it in. Opium was a regular, although small part of Astor's cargoes from 1815 to 1820. Occasionally, opium was sold to traders just outside Canton in exchange for silver, which was then used to purchase teas.



Astor's instructions to his agent Nicholas Ogden exhibited the obvious caution needed in this trade; "I should think opium must towards the last of the season get up, in a few hands. I believe no one knows of our having any on board the Seneca, except Captain Clark, and its put up in casks as if furs."

Astor's business rebounded in 1817 after the U.S. Congress passed a protectionist law that barred foreign fur traders from U.S. territories. The American Fur Company came to dominate trading in the area around the Great Lakes, absorbing competitors in a monopoly. In 1822, Astor established the Robert Stuart House on Mackinac Island in Michigan as headquarters for the reorganized American Fur Company, making the island a metropolis of the fur trade. Astor's commercial connections extended over the entire globe, and his ships were found in every sea.



Astor was tall, thin, and commanding in appearance. He had only one hallucination, and that was that he spoke the English language. The accent he possessed at thirty was with him in all its pristine effulgence at eighty-five.

"Nopody would know I was a Cherman—aind't it?" he used to say. He spoke French, a dash of Spanish and could parley in Choctaw, Ottawa, Mohawk and Huron. But they who speak several languages must not be expected to speak any one language well.

Yet when John Jacob wrote it was English without a flaw. In all of his dealings he was uniquely honorable and upright. He paid and he made others pay. His word was his bond. He was not charitable in the sense of indiscriminate giving. "To give something for nothing is to weaken the giver," was one of his favorite sayings. That this attitude protected a miserly spirit, it is easy to say, but it is not wholly true. In his later years he carried with him a book containing a record of his possessions. This was his breviary. In it he took a very pardonable delight. He would visit a certain piece of property, and then turn to his book and see what it had cost him ten or twenty years before. To realize that his prophetic vision had been correct was to him a great source of satisfaction.

His habits were of the best. He went to bed at nine o'clock, and was up before six. At seven he was at his office. He knew enough to eat sparingly and to walk, so he was never sick. John Jacob Astor was exceptional in his combined love of money and love of books. History was at his tongue's end, and geography was his plaything. Fitz-Greene Halleck was his private secretary, hired on a basis of literary friendship. Washington Irving was a close friend, too, and first crossed the Atlantic on an Astor pass. He banked on Washington Irving's genius, and loaned him money to come and go, and buy a house. Irving was named in Astor's will as one of the trustees of the Astor Library Fund, and repaid all favors by writing "Astoria."

Astor died March 29, 1848, aged eighty-four. It was a natural death, a thing that very seldom occurs. The machinery all ran down at once. Realizing his lack of book learning, his will left four hundred thousand dollars to found the Astor Library, in order that others might profit where he had lacked.

END – John Jacob Astor – Business Master

### About the Author

**Larry W Jones is a songwriter, having penned over 7,700 song lyrics. Published in 22 volumes of island themed, country, cowboy, western and bluegrass songs. The entire assemblage is the world's largest collection of lyrics written by an individual songwriter.**

**As a wrangler on the “Great American Horse Drive”, at age 68, he assisted in driving 800 half-wild horses 62 miles in two days, from Winter pasture grounds in far NW Colorado to the Big Gulch Ranch outside of Craig Colorado.**

**His book, “The Oldest Greenhorn”, chronicles the adventures and perils in earning the “Gate-to-Gate” trophy belt buckle the hard way.**



### **Other books published by Larry W Jones:**

1. A Squirrel Named Julie and The Fox Ridge Fox
2. The Painting Of A Dream
3. The Boy With Green Thumbs and The Wild Tree Man
4. Red Cloud – Chief Of the Sioux
5. Spotted Tail – The Orphan Negotiator
6. Little Crow – The Fur Trapper's Patron
7. Chief Gall – The Strategist
8. Crazy Horse – The Vision Quest Warrior
9. Sitting Bull - The Powder River Power
10. Rain-In-The-Face – The Setting Sun Brave
11. Two Strike – The Lakota Club Fighter
12. Chief American Horse – The Oglala Councilor
13. Chief Dull Knife – The Sharp-Witted Cheyenne
14. Chief Joseph – Retreat From Grande Ronde
15. The Oregon Trail Orphans
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17. Kids In Bloom Volume 2
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32. The Jungle Book – Kaa's Hunting
33. The Jungle Book – Tiger! Tiger!
34. The Jungle Book – The White Seal
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50. Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit
51. Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea
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53. Ode To Toulee – From Gosling To Goose
54. China Clipper – Floatplanes Of Pan Am
55. Images Of Old England
56. Range Of A Cowboy
57. Clipper Ships – Emigrants Passage
58. Clipper Ships – Wool and Wealth
59. Clipper Ships – Iron Maidens
60. Clipper Ships – The Kiwi Connection
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62. Ohiyesa – From Sioux To Surgeon
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107. Comanche Moon Of Blanco Canyon
108. Rip Van Winkle – The Sleepy Dutchman
109. Michelangelo – Renaissance Man
110. Baldwin - King Of Locomotives
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112. The Blue Lagoon Saga
113. Molly Finney – Capture Slavery Freedom

All his publications are available on [Lulu.com](https://www.lulu.com)